

Illinois English Bulletin

The Great Books Program in Lemont

Coordinating Composition
with Literature

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The Great Books Program in Lemont

BY MICHAEL GALATI

APOLOGIA


The old idea that we can provide students with a system of thought adequate to their future needs is false!

In the subject supposed certain by some, the sciences, do we now assume our vast and extensive understandings concerning the nature of the physical universe to be complete? Do we, unlike those of the ages before whose "systems" proved to be fable finally possess a *last* system to which the universe can be bound? Not too long ago in the age of man, Aristotle distinguished thus between syllogistic and enthymematic reasoning; the first concerns

One of the best aids we have found in humanizing man is consideration of the thoughts and sufferings and aspirations of other men in other places and other times. Mr. Galati, chairman of the Department of English in Lemont Township High School, Lemont, Illinois, describes a great books program and gives us this proven plan for teaching the humanities to superior students in our English classes.

The second article in the BULLETIN was written by Mrs. Enid Olson who draws on her wide experience in teaching English in Urbana High School. This excellent study, "Coordinating Composition with Literature," was presented first as a talk at the meeting of the IATE last October. Those who heard the presentation were so impressed by the straight thinking and practicality that they requested more be permitted to share it through the BULLETIN.

* In this era of new thresholds, it is difficult to claim, "Here is the system, and here is the fable!" What priceless premise is next to fall we cannot say, but we can look with amusement on this vast, ever-growing library of fiction, every member of which, in its day of favor, stood as irrefutable scientific knowledge.



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to suppose that a factor such as this is to be left to chance. Besides, our secondary and primary schools have for too long *not* had the objective of creating man thinking for anyone to presume that the success of this untried (untried, that is, outside of those few instances we herald with delight, in which case our very delight betrays the fewness of the instances) objective would be detrimental to the adolescent mind. On the contrary, to end the rebuttal, preparing an adolescent for adulthood means, not that we have some formula which he need but absorb for satisfactory adjustment, rather does it mean that we have given him the means with which to solve the problems of his mature years. And that means is thought.

But then, is there a need to teach thought external to the relatively safe and undisturbing spheres of the sciences? Since the time of Aristotle Western man has labeled the spheres of the sciences certainties, and the spheres of the non-sciences probabilities. It would be odd that now, when the sciences themselves have demonstrated their own uncertainties, that Western man should wish to reverse the pair so that the non-sciences become the certainties. Are we to uphold the uncertain certainty of our grammars? Are we forever to freeze the standards of style? Worse! Are we to ignore the conflicting morals and insights of our vast literature as we bury our ostriched heads in the shifting sands of certainty?

The schism over thought is not new. Recall that Plato would ban the poets for the provocation they would cause his Republic. Recall, too, that Aristotle spoke of the poets as being the agents of catharsis whereby the baser emotions of man were cleansed. Yet, the very agelessness of the schism supplies the very proof of our conclusion, that man has a continuing obligation to re-think the tenable and the untenable both.

How is this to be learned? I suggest we learn to think by thinking. We learn to think geometry by thoughtfully using the maxims of geometry. We learn to think the principles of physics by the thoughtful exploration of the principles of physics. We learn to think the problems of man by thinking out the problems of man. Each class must involve more than the handing down of knowledge and first principles of its discipline. Each class must involve the fresh re-examination of its knowledge and of its principles, even if this means a re-examination of our hallowed grammars and of our hallowed literature, even if this means the discarding of personal adjustments to reality based on an inflated notion of our ability to perceive with certainty. In all, it means discussion, and

it means debate. It means provocation. It means re-thinking the thoughts of the ages, and becoming conversant with these thoughts; it means holding the great conversation.

It is on the basis of this apologia that three years ago our department of English launched for its students a program in the study and the discussion of the great books.

APOCALYPSE

To have begun a high-school seminar in the great books three years ago was to feel with Keats,

... like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

Of course, during the years since the inception of the Lemont seminar, there has been change. Yet, of far greater importance than any change in the seminar, is the change the seminar itself has wrought, under whatever its format, in the individual lives of the membership. What an encouragement it has been to us to discover adolescents with Socrates seeking the nature of Justice through the opening leaves of *The Republic*, with Gulliver withdrawing from the Yahoo, with Veblen scrutinizing the motive to possess, or with Hardy discovering the Henchard in all of us. Experiences such as these lead us to rejoice with Holmes, that "A man's mind stretched by a new idea can never go back to its original dimensions."

Our first format was immediately successful. Two sponsors alternated the leadership chores through eight to ten monthly evening sessions of approximately two hours duration. A committee of students planned the reading of the year and submitted their recommendations for the approval of the total membership. Membership was at first enrolled by a system in which the sponsors sent letters of special invitation to promising seniors, juniors, and sophomores. Membership ranged in the twenties (our enrollment at the time was 340) with attendance at approximately 80% of membership. Parents were frequent and interested guests.

However, we soon discovered that our creation was not faultless, and that an uncharted course such as the one we had taken has a number of pits in which the exuberant sponsor might find himself. In retrospection, the difficulties which presented themselves seem the natural and obvious results of our format, but at the

moment of first awareness, they were too frequently perplexing and unwelcome intruders.

We had three major problems. First, due to our inability to review all the works recommended, on occasion books which some have thought objectionable were introduced for study. Second, because it became difficult to involve prospective members in discussions dominated by the more experienced, by our second year of operation we had failed to secure the membership of any significant number of students new to the seminar idea. And third, inasmuch as class and seminar work had no necessary connection, it became undesirably difficult to coordinate the actual reading practices of the seminar with any special reading instruction in the classroom.

Thus, the present format is not the format first conceived. To meet the problem of selections thought objectionable the power of selection was given to the sponsor exclusively, who by this time could make numerous choices on the basis of the desirability of past selections. To meet the problem of a stagnating membership role the first several seminar meetings were introduced into the separate honors English classrooms, thus permitting prospective members to experience the great-books idea before participating with the more experienced reader-discussants during the later evening meetings. To meet the problem of disconnection between class and seminar work those seminar meetings incorporated into the honors classrooms were made an integral part of the curriculum of those classrooms. Thus, the extra-curricular seminar of three years ago is today co-curricular.*

Under the co-curricular format the seminar meets a minimum of six times each year in coincidence with each grading period (and also in coincidence with each required book report). The last four of these meetings are held in the evenings and are attended by any student irrespective of class level or of previous seminar experience. Conversely, the first two of these meetings are held in close conjunction with the honors English Curriculum. These last mentioned sessions are held in the separate honors classes (sophomore, junior, and seniors, one of each) with the specific purposes of introducing the seminar idea to the non-initiate and to prepare him for participation with more experienced discussants during the later joint seminars.

* The Lemont format is unique. It is neither wholly curricular, as in the format of New Trier, nor wholly extra-curricular. It blends the advantages of curriculum and activity, gaining the positive instructional benefits to be derived from curricular projects while maintaining the advantages of flexibility in time, membership, and requirements inherent to activities.

The meetings are conducted in much the way that they were in the beginning. A faculty sponsor plans a line of questioning in advance of the session, but this preparation is not a rigid guide for the discussion proper. Generally, certain of the questions will induce the tangential probing of the group as they prefer the fascination of a door newly opened to them to that of the immediate opening of yet another. Frequently too, the leadership will float without plan to some student participant or to another faculty sponsor, the leadership role ultimately being played by whoever assumes it.

Class and evening sessions are not always identical in form. First, sessions meeting during the honors classes involve the entire class although at the discretion of the instructor the class discussion might be supplemented by that of smaller groups. Such a session might last from one to possibly three or four days, its length being dependent on the interest generated. Or, conceivably, a work might be discussed in its parts over a period of weeks. Second, by way of contrast, evening sessions might generally last for two hours of one evening and have, as in the past, centered the discussion in the whole group.

Books to be read and discussed are selected by the sponsors from publishers' lists of inexpensive paper-back editions. The sponsors' choices are guided by lists of the great books as contained in the catalogue of St. John's College, in Mortimer Adler's *How to Read a Book*, and in various lists of readings provided with the set, *Great Books of the Western World*. However, the final and reviewing criterion of any selection is always the past experience of the sponsor with the book under consideration.

This year the seminar is in the first year of readings of a three-year sponsor-selected reading list which is repeatable in cycles of three years (see pages 9, 10), the maximum length of time during which any student can be active in seminar work. Inasmuch as each year of the cycle sees the introduction of new participants, the list has not been arranged according to any intentionally graduated level of difficulty.

In addition to these aspects of the program, and as has been suggested above, a most significant part of the co-curricular format is that played by reading instruction in the honors classroom. Here, our techniques are dependent on certain premises concerning reading instruction: that comprehension of the difficult is a legitimate objective of reading instruction, that such comprehension is a painstaking process requiring at times unusually patient effort on the part of the reader, that the current emphasis on speed reading has little beneficial effect on the reading of the difficult and

may even be harmful when not contained to its proper material, and that reading comprehension, to be complete, must include the larger category of cognizance.

Consequently, it is our practice, approximately once every week, to give students particularly difficult and thought-challenging passages to be analyzed for meaning and implication. This work includes the investigation of the meaning of key words in the passage through dictionary research and through a study of the context, the translation of the passage into words meaningful to the student (being certain that each of the author's several thoughts are reproduced correctly), the comprehension of related passages for additional insight, the investigation of the connotative nature of the words employed in the passage, and the criticism of the passage as to agreements and disagreements existing between the author and the reader. Of course, to whatever extent possible, these exercises are drawn from the current seminar selection (see *Apology-Crito* study guide, pages 10, 11).

Furthermore, in their readings students are urged to make frequent marginal notations of ideas encountered and of their reactions to the various particulars of the work. General study guides covering key questions, unlike the more particularized guide presented in appendix, are usually given to the student prior to the discussion, not to be dutifully answered, but rather to be a guide to the investigation of key topics within the work.

This, then, is our program. It has undergone change and probably will undergo more, but nevertheless, we believe it to be based on sound premises and to be resulting in an education which goes beyond conventional expectations. It is not enough to say that Johnny has been exposed to . . . , or has become acquainted with . . . ; because Johnny is no longer satisfied with lesser things, because Johnny has become curious, wishing to understand more and to resolve better, and because Johnny has undergone the provocation of ideas, never to return to his original dimensions. *A posse ad esse!*

Appendix A

CREDO

- I. We believe that each child has an innate right to the opportunities which lead to the fulfillment of self.

We believe that this self is, in the case of the superior student in particular, woefully under-estimated.

We believe that this self is most richly fulfilled when the student has encountered thought through the provocation of ideas.

- II. Further, we believe that each child has an innate right to a secure adjustment with reality.

We believe that this adjustment can never be secured through developing in the child an illusion of understanding and of wisdom by avoiding the provocative out of preference for the comforting.

We believe that a secure adjustment with reality is possible only in those instances in which the child has extended himself to an understanding of the limitations of the human mind in general and of his mind in particular.

- III. Further, we believe that man-fulfilled and that man-adjusted is man-thinking, and that the primary objective of ALL education is to create man-thinking.

Appendix B

LEMONT TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL GREAT BOOKS SEMINAR THREE YEAR READING LIST

First Year.

Sophomore honors:

1. Plato. *The Crito, The Apology*.*
2. Melville. *Moby Dick*.

Junior honors:

1. Plato. *The Crito, The Apology*.*
2. Hardy. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.*

Senior honors:

1. Aeschylus. *Prometheus Bound*.
2. Aristotle. *The Poetics*.

Joint seminars:

3. DeToqueville. *Democracy in America*.
4. Homer. *Iliad*.
5. Lippman. *The Public Philosophy*.
6. Locke. *On Civil Government*, passages.

Second Year.

Sophomore honors:

- 1 and 2. As in year one.

Junior honors:

1. Burke. *On Conciliation with the Colonies*.
2. Shakespeare. *The Merchant of Venice*.

Senior honors:

- 1 and 2. As in year one.

Joint seminars:

3. Dickens. *Tale of Two Cities*.*
4. Shakespeare. *Julius Caesar*.*
5. Shakespeare. *Hamlet*.*
6. Veblen. *Theory of the Leisure Class*.*

Third Year.

Sophomore honors:

1 and 2. As in year one.

Junior honors:

1 and 2. As in year one.

Senior honors:

1 and 2. As in year one.

Joint seminars:

3. Orwell. *Animal Farm*.*4. Jefferson. *Declaration of Independence*.*5. Hardy. *Mayor of Casterbridge*.*6. Plato. *Republic*, Books I and II.*

Alternates.

Hamilton, Jay, Madison. *The Federalist Papers**Plato. *The Gorgias*.*Homer. *The Odyssey*.

* Indicates selection has been employed in previous years.

Appendix C

STUDY GUIDE: PLATO'S *APOLOGY* AND *CRITO*

Concerning Study Habits: Do not be frightened by a word encountered not in your vocabulary. On the occasion of your encounter, whether in a reading selection or whether in a question to be answered, have recourse to a dictionary. *Webster's New International Dictionary* or the *Oxford English Dictionary* is preferred. In the following study, the difficult word is more likely to appear in the questions than in the selection itself.

Skills to be learned: Reading and Critical Thinking

1. The ability to trace a writer's argument through all of its phases
2. The habit of thinking critically about an author's arguments, of reacting in agreement or disagreement with the author's contentions, of giving valid reasons for these reactions
3. The ability to properly interpret questions asked
4. Reading vocabulary enlargement

Questions pertaining to *The Crito*, W. H. D. Rouse (Trans.). *Great Dialogues of Plato* (New York: The New American Library, 1956), pp. 451-459.

p. 451.

1. What contention does Socrates set out to prove?
2. What analogies does he attempt? Are these for proof or clarification?
3. Are you in agreement or disagreement with these?

p. 452.

1. How does Socrates counter his own arguments? What is his purpose in this?
2. What new premise does he introduce?

p. 453.

1. What limitations are imposed on the discussion? Why is it necessary to impose a limitation? Do you agree with the one made?
2. What two premises, apparently introduced earlier, are reviewed? What is your reaction to these?

p. 454.

1. How does Socrates test the premises?
2. What application is made of the premise?

p. 455.

1. How is the application clarified? Why was it necessary to introduce a particular case?
2. What is your reaction to the argument of the laws?
3. Can you identify the argument *a fortiori*? Why is this effective? Is sarcasm involved? What?

p. 456.

1. How does Socrates amplify the point the laws make?
2. Are you in agreement with the laws?

p. 457.

1. Why do the laws apply to Socrates more than to others? Is this technique similar to one encountered earlier?

p. 458.

1. According to this selection, how would the escape of Socrates confirm his conviction? Do you consider this a sound contention? How is this substantiated? What irony does this substantiation throw on the conviction of Socrates?

Total.

1. Are you convinced with Crito? Would you dissuade Socrates into escape?
2. If convinced, by what arguments?
3. If not convinced, for what reasons not convinced?
 - A. I did not understand the argument.
 - B. Socrates was uninformed on the issues discussed.
 - C. Socrates was misinformed on the issues discussed.
 - D. Socrates was illogical.
4. If your answer to No. 3 was
 - A. Go back and reread the selection carefully until you understand.
 - B. Tell what information Socrates did not have and how it would alter the conclusions.
 - C. Tell what information employed by Socrates was incorrect and how its correction would alter the conclusions.
 - D. Point out the inconsistencies in the argument of Socrates and correct the conclusions accordingly.

Coordinating Composition with Literature

BY ENID OLSON

Why should composition be coordinated with literature? Will such coordination lead to critical thinking in the English class? What are some of the hints and guides that a teacher might use to draw out response to literary selections? These are some of the questions with which I shall deal in this paper.

This discussion is the result of my experiences in teaching high school freshmen, and it rises from the proposition that most of the writing of ninth grade students should be based on the literature they read.

First of all, I have found most ninth graders to be self-conscious in writing exclusively about themselves. They'll write an autobiographical sketch at the beginning of the year as an introduction to their instructor; that is only fair and courteous, they think. But beyond that, they tend to be embarrassed by much "self-focus."

I think we need to remember that the English course is not just another course in child-centered orientation, social studies, or family living. I have no quarrel with the objectives of these other courses, but I maintain that English courses have other goals to achieve, other contents to offer, and other means to a valid end.

Please don't misunderstand me. I don't ignore the human element in English teaching. I couldn't. What is literature without people? What value is reading unless it meets a need of our own as human beings, perspectivizes us in time and space, and reassures us of the universality of our emotions and rationales, making us at home in the whole human family?

But I am convinced that it is easier to gauge the insight of ninth graders into human understanding through their comments on characters in literature than through comments they must make about themselves directly, often reluctantly. (I suspect that this statement is true of students other than high school freshmen. A college professor who teaches a course called Literature and Religion has told me of the barrenness of students' diaries in which they are the central characters but of the rewards found in journals in which students record their reactions to their reading). It is also easier, I believe, to build more mature understanding through discussions on characters in literature than through direct discus-

sion of the students' own problems. The English teacher conducts a class and is not the counselor in a private interview.

For example, when it has seemed logical and advisable to talk about children and parents, I have found that freshmen much prefer to base their comments on such selections as Kathryn Forbes' *Mama's Bank Account*, William Saroyan's "The Parsley Garden," Clarence Day's *Life with Father*, Jesse Stuart's "Split Cherry Tree," Hiram Percy Maxim's "The Double-Headed Penny" or "The Whipping," Lloyd Douglas' "My Papa," Gilbreth and Carey's *Cheaper by the Dozen*, Dorothy Canfield's "Apprentice," or Morley Callaghan's "Luke Baldwin's Vow."

Therefore, assignments based on the literature they read draw students out of themselves by exposing them to provocative thoughts of outstanding writers and by challenging them to stretch their minds beyond their early, youthful limits. After all, freshmen haven't had time to live long and to accumulate a wide range of experiences. They need to read—and write—about other people. Then they may relate the experiences of others to experiences of their own.

Secondly, coordinating writing with literature encourages ninth graders to "read themselves full" so that they may "think themselves empty" to greater advantage. Was it just an accident that the National Council of Teachers of English in its Basic Issues supplement to the *English Journal* for September, 1959, defined "our goal" (note the singular) in this one sentence: "A still graver question is whether we have succeeded in inculcating in our students a permanent *love of good literature* and a pride in the *ability to use their language* with clarity and grace"? (Italics are mine). Did you also notice that when Dr. Joseph Mersand in the October, 1959, *Illinois English Bulletin* quoted the objectives of the English syllabus for the high schools of New York City, adopted in 1922, and apparently still endorses them, number four was this: "To improve their power of self-expression by stimulating thought and by supplying information and models of construction"?

Therefore, reading and writing in English class seem to be two sides of the same coin, and a logician's dichotomy between the two is fallacious. Oh, I have taught composition to high school seniors and college freshmen without an overt coordination with literature. But actually, in those classes the instructor encourages his students to draw on all that they have read; and just as we say that a good impromptu speaker has spent his whole life in preparation for that moment, so a good rhetoric student has been reading and remembering long before a specific paper. In English, as in speech, we

cannot weigh what we say less than how we say it, and literature helps provide content for a good presentation, written or oral. Certainly, let no teacher of literature say he cannot teach composition because he is teaching a literature course!

Thirdly, assignments based on the literature students read develop skill in expository writing. I can understand the necessity of recall-narrative techniques in the elementary grades. Elementary students, usually uninhibited, are eager to write about themselves and their families; their language arts teacher is justified in capitalizing on that spontaneity. But by the time students reach college, they are expected to handle the techniques of exposition.

Frequently a college professor of rhetoric comments that his freshmen write adequately in narration but flounder in exposition. Don't six or eight years of personal narrative in our public school language arts need to give way to six or at least four years of practice in exposition? And certainly terminal students, after high school, will do much more writing of expository reports, for instance, than that of recall-narration. Don't they need practice in exposition also?

The most serious pitfall in coordinating composition with literature, I suppose, is a tendency for students to copy or imitate the authors they have read. But I know that the English teacher can help ninth graders to avoid slavish imitation of model authors and to utilize their own thinking.

The most useful devices I have developed to elicit students' own thinking is to word the theme title as a question or phrase based on a problem posed in a literature selection and then to provide guide questions for them to answer in their paper. For either an impromptu theme or one written outside of class, I usually offer a choice of titles; each student selects one title which he thinks he can develop the best.

For example, for a theme on *Great Expectations*, these may be suitable titles: "Does Snobbery Protect Happiness?" "Does Money Make Hopes Come True?" "Does Gratitude Cost Too Much?" "Are the Self-Respecting Repentant?" "Can One Afford to Forgive?" "Is There Value in Unsophistication?" "Is Pride Good or Bad?" "How Can We Measure the Worth of a Person?" "How Does Dickens Use Humor?"

On *Abe Lincoln Grows Up*, I may offer these phrases which Sandburg himself used: "Books Were a Comfort," "A Pioneer Sacrifice," "The Wilderness Is Careless," "His Silences Were Immense," "Abe Was 'Peculiarsome'," "The Chill of the Lonesome Feeling."

A study of *The Odyssey* may offer these various wordings of titles: "The Qualities of an Epic Hero," "The Character of Odysseus," or "Odysseus' Relationship with His Men"; "The Greek Outlook on Fate" or "The Role of the Gods in the Lives of the Greeks"; "The Reasons for the 'Detours' on the Homeward Trip"; "The Nature of the Land Around the Mediterranean"; "Homer's Figurative Language."

You will note that the wording of and choices of titles adapt themselves to various ability levels. Any one class may be presented with as many or as few choices as the teacher thinks necessary.

The use of guide questions accomplishes two things: it helps to guarantee expository writing, and it helps the student organize his thinking and writing. Ninth graders need help with both problems until they gain more experience in composition. If any student simply retells a portion of the story, the teacher can point out how he failed to answer the questions and ask him to give the answers either orally or in another composition. The student learns that following the guide questions eliminates half of the struggle of writing a theme.

The following guide questions may serve most title choices: What significance does this question have in the selection? How does the author answer the question? How do the characters illustrate the problem in their own lives? In the light of experiences of yourself or your friends, what do you think the answer is?

Questions such as the following may be helpful with some of the *Odyssey* titles: What points do you think Homer wanted us to believe about this topic? How did his characters illustrate these points? Cite incidents to illustrate your (and Homer's) opinion. Quote specific lines ("Put these lines in quotation marks so we can tell the difference between Homer's words and yours"!) that helped form your opinion.

In discussing "Homer's Figurative Language," the student may organize his discussion along these lines: What objects did Homer describe by means of figurative language? What figures of speech did he use? Quote lines which contain Homer's descriptive comparisons.

In order to coordinate composition with literature, one may base themes on a unit of many selections. For instance, a unit on narrative and lyric poetry may suggest these possibilities of titles with their respective guide questions:

"Figurative Language in Lyric Poetry": What is figurative language? How have lyric poets in our reading used figures

of speech? What does figurative language accomplish in lyric poetry?

"The Dramatic Incident": What is a dramatic incident? What are its requirements? How does it involve the central character? What is its place in narrative poetry?

"How Do Poets Achieve Humor?": How does a poet use situation and character? How does he use rhyme, figures of speech, incongruity, and the surprise ending? In what way may humor in verse be funnier than that in prose?

"The Functions of Narrative Poetry": What are the purposes of narrative poetry? What problems does a narrative poet have that a short story writer does not have? What problems does a narrative poet have that a lyric poet does not? What are the advantages of telling a narrative in verse?

"How a Poet Describes Nature (or Weather)" or "How a Poet Describes Human Nature": Describe how poets reveal understanding of environment or personality through observation, through comparisons, a dramatic incident, and emotion or mood. Quote poets by name and poems by title and/or lines.

"Analyze a Poem" (give choice of poems): Name and identify the poet. What "setting" or situation prompted the poem? What seems to be the central idea? Quote the lines which give the "heart" of the poem's message.

"My Favorite Lyric Poem" or "My Favorite Narrative Poem": Tell why you like this poem. Refer to subject matter, tone, rhythm, rhyme or absence of it, and the poet's word choices.

Such themes as these may serve at the end of a biography unit in which several sketches have been read: "Comfort and Distress" on a statement about Eleanor Roosevelt by Clare Booth Luce; "The Country Fair" on the autobiographical narrative and painting by Grandma Moses; "The Power of the English Language" on a quotation by Winston Churchill; "Poor Little Rich Boy" on Winston Churchill as a problem child; "A Divine Spark" on George Washington Carver; "Immortal Work" on Jesse Stuart's quotation from Daniel Webster in the frontispiece to *The Thread That Runs So True*; and "Dreams and Sacrifices" on Albert Schweitzer's analogy with the patriarch, Abraham.

As students gain experience in writing and as they become more mature, comparative literature presents a wealth of opportunities to coordinate composition with literature. I generally individualize the following assignments and give one set of readings to a particular student. I determine students' interests by rereading their autobiographies and by rereading the notes I took when they gave their oral introductions, both at the beginning of the school year. I write out for each student the assignment on a slip of paper, giving titles, authors, where to find each selection, and what questions he should answer in his theme.

Suggested List of Readings

To use the selections on children and parents that I mentioned earlier in this discussion, one might ask these questions: Compare the parents in these stories—their backgrounds, their attitudes toward their children, their integrity (or honesty), their ability to handle problems. Which parents made life easier for their children, and in what ways? In what different ways did they show their love?

Another possibility is to read "My Papa" by Lloyd Douglas, "My Father" by Robert P. Tristram Coffin, "Pygmalion" by Gilbreth and Carey, "My Father Loved the Jumping-Off Places" by R. P. T. Coffin, and "My Mother and Father" by Ernie Pyle. Then answer these questions: Compare any similarities you notice among these selections, either as to subject, personality of characters, discussion of an era of time, or development of reader interest through narration and exposition. What are the basic differences among the selections?

A student may be asked to read from four selections—"School Life" by Hamlin Garland, "The Last Class" by Alphonse Daudet, *Abe Lincoln Grows Up* by Carl Sandburg, and *The Thread That Runs So True* by Jesse Stuart—and answer such questions as these: What similarities are there, if any, between Garland's and Daudet's schools? What are the differences? Compare these two with what Sandburg and Stuart had to say about early schools. How is education a product of its physical setting? How is it accomplished despite its locale and setting?

Another assignment may be men and the sea. A student may read "Doubling Cape Horn" by Richard Henry Dana, "Rounding the Horn" from *Dauber* by John Masefield, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and "Falk" by Joseph Conrad. He can compare settings, characters, problems of man against man and man against the elements, and authors' styles.

Men and war may include such selections as *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane, Prince Andrey Pondering War in *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy, and "The Warrior's Soul" by Joseph Conrad and offer a comparison of the attitudes of the authors (through their characters) toward war.

One student may like to read "African Convoy" by Ernie Pyle and "The Honor of France" by R. Ingersoll and compare them on these points: setting, central incident, development of action, description of people and places, author's style. Then he may explore the basic differences between the two and tell which article, in his opinion, better accomplishes its purpose.

Another assignment may be to read "The Man Who Won the War" by R. Bruckner and "A Passage to Persia" by F. MacLean. Both of these tell of some little known incident in a war. Compare the incidents—their time and locale, the characters involved, the plot as it was planned and as it transpired, and the significance of each incident. How was each event lost in obscurity after its war?

Boys, particularly, like skin-diving or deep sea-diving and underwater exploration. One assignment is to read "On the Ocean's Floor" by William Beebe, "Almost Island" by W. Beebe, and "Shark Close-Ups" by J. Y. Costeau with these instructions: Compare the subject matter of the three, show similarities and contrasts in the descriptions, and tell which selection appealed to you the most and why.

Another would be to read "The Reef" by S. Scoville, "The Terror of the Deep" by Berge and Lanier, "A Round Trip into Ocean Depths" by Taylor, and "I Turn Pearl Diver" by Nordhoff. Then follow these directions: Compare the subject matter of these selections, show the similarities of description, and notice the difference between the fiction and the non-fiction. Which selection was the most interesting to you, and why?

Mountain climbing fascinates many youngsters. Possible assignments would be to read "Pass Poison" by W. O. Douglas, "Two Boys on a Mountain" by Douglas, and "The Jubilant Mountains" by M. L. Robinson. Compare these three essays in the ways in which the authors handle their incidents. How do they build up and maintain suspense? What similarities are there? What differences?

Or one may read "Rock Crystal" by Adalbert Stifter and "Banner in the Sky" by J. R. Ullman and explore these questions: What comparisons can you make as to subject, incident, characters, settings, motivations of action, and outcome? What contrasts are there between the two?

Big game hunting holds attraction for many. A set of readings includes "Lion Hunting with Truck and Camera" by Osa Johnson, "Lions" by Martin and Osa Johnson, "Tusk and Fang in Burma" by E. Marshall, and "Trailing the Jaguar" by Willard Price. Compare the subject material, the attitude of the authors toward their experiences, and the purposes of writing these selections. Contrast the differences.

One can look at the subject from another point of view and read "Lion Hunting with Truck and Camera" by Osa Johnson and "The Physical Environment of Man" by Julian Huxley and compare what each author has to say about game sanctuaries and what seems to be the motivation for each one's beliefs. Who is the more persuasive, and why?

Reading several selections about one person, such as George Washington Carver or Albert Schweitzer, yields rewards for the interested student. The first could be "Son of the South" by Rackham Holt, "The Boy Who Was Traded for a Horse" by J. S. Childers, and "The Man Who Asked God Questions" in a Friendship Press booklet. How did each selection amplify the personality of Dr. Carver? Which was the most informative? Which was the most enjoyable reading? Why?

The second could be "Genius in the Jungle" by J. Gollomb; "They Thought He Was Mad," Friendship Press; "God's Eager Fool" by J. A. O'Brien; and "The Story of Albert Schweitzer" by Jo Manton. Compare what these sources tell about the life and faith of Dr. Schweitzer. Which article did you find the most interesting and why? How does each article supplement the others? Which is the most concise, which the most revealing, and which the most comprehensive?

Sometimes several selections by one author interest students. Jesse Stuart's stories "The Champion," "Catalogue Girl," "Split Cherry Tree," and "The Slip-Over Sweater" lend themselves to this treatment: Show their similarities in setting, characters, developments of plot, choice of subject material, elements of humor, and handling of dialogue. What are the main differences among them?

Stephen Leacock's "My Financial Career," "A, B, and C," and "How We Kept Mother's Day" offer this possibility: Compare these essays as to style, subject, satire, and revelation of the author's personality. How can you tell that they are by the same author? What is the purpose of each essay, and which best accomplishes its purpose?

William O. Douglas' "Pass Poison," "Two Boys on a Mountain," and "The Victory" present these questions: Are there any indications in style and subject that these articles are by the same author? What are the similarities, and what are the differences in the selections? What do they tell you about the personality of the author?

Men and the polar regions seem irresistible to a few students. There are several possible assignments here. One is "Men Against the Arctic" by C. Palmer, "Bush Pilots of the Far North" by E. Muller, and "Getting Ready for Winter in the Arctic" by C. and H. Helmericks. Compare how each of these treats the problems of life in the Arctic. Do they present similar or different problems? Illustrate. Which is the most informative and why? Which is the most readable?

Another is "The Poles Are His Pylons" by Cooper and Palmer, "The Blow" by Richard E. Byrd, and "Alone" by R. E. Byrd (excerpts). In what way does each of these selections contribute to an understanding of Admiral Byrd and his work? In what ways are they similar? Or different? Which was the most enjoyable to read? Which, if any, seemed more informative than the others?

A third possibility is "The South Pole" by Thomas R. Henry, "The Last March" by Robert Falcon Scott, and "The Brink of Silence" by Esther Galbraith. Compare how each selection treats the problem of Antarctic exploration, how first person narratives compare with third person narratives, and how a dramatization compares with expository articles.

This comparison of several literary forms all on one topic or related topics poses some interesting opportunities for literary evaluations. One such assignment deals with pre-Communist China. Readings are "The Rock" by Pearl Buck, a one-act play; "After Final Victory" by Agnes Smedley, a personal narrative; "The Heart of China" by T. W. Lawson, another personal narrative but almost like a short story; and "To the Children of Revolutionary War Heroes," a letter by Madame Chiang Kai-Shek. The student may compare what they reveal about pre-Communist China, its problems, its people, and its spirit. Contrast the methods used in drama and in personal narrations. Which best seems to accomplish its purpose?

Strangely enough, the topic of men and whales presents a variety of readings with a theme writing possibility. The readings range all the way from "The Chase" from *Moby Dick* by Melville to "Cap'n Bibber's Biggest Fish" by R. P. T. Coffin and include "Whaling" by Robert C. Murphy, "The Lost Harpoon" by Harry

Edward Neal, "The Whale" by William Rose Benet, and "Ile" by Eugene O'Neill.

Then there are the rather obvious similarities in such short stories as "The Black Cat" by Edgar Allan Poe, "The Mysterious Mansion" by Honore de Balzac, and "A Municipal Report" by O. Henry.

Once in a great while an advanced, mature ninth grader, likely to be science-minded, comes along. Here is an assignment which I gave to such a student in my class. I suggested that he read these articles: "Why History Offers Hope" by Arnold Toynbee, "Man Will Prevail" by William Faulkner, "What *Good* Is the Atom?" by David Lilienthal, "The Chief Interest of a Scientist" by Albert Einstein, "A New Age Is Born" from a U. S. War Department communication, "The Last Letter" by Prime Minister Nehru, and "The Friendly Atom" by David Lilienthal. Then I said, "In the light of the above articles, write a paper on the topic, 'The Role of the Scientist in a *Lay* World.' " He rose to the occasion. His paper was remarkable and stressed the need for the communicability of the scientist to the rest of the world.

Since most of the selections I have mentioned here are found in ninth or tenth grade anthologies, they are not difficult to assign. Sometimes students want to branch out and read beyond their own texts and classroom sets. Then the school and municipal libraries can come to the rescue.

The teacher should be ready for most student interests if he wishes to individualize theme assignments. For every once in a while a mature student even wishes to explore such a topic as man and death. Then one wants to be ready with "Thanatopsis" by William Cullen Bryant, "Prospice" by Robert Browning, "Against the Fear of Death" by Titus Lucretius Carus, "The Great Summons" by Ch'u Yuan, and "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" by Emily Dickinson. These questions can be furnished: What similarities are there in the attitudes of these authors toward death? What differences? Whose ideas seem the most natural, the most logical? Whose idea appeals most to you? Why?

Always, the *why* is even more important than the *what*. For the *why* shows evidence of thinking, which both reading and writing should stimulate. And after all, isn't the stimulating of thinking a real purpose in coordinating literature with composition in the ninth grade?

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